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# Making taxes less taxing

Mary Brannon '04  
*Furman University*

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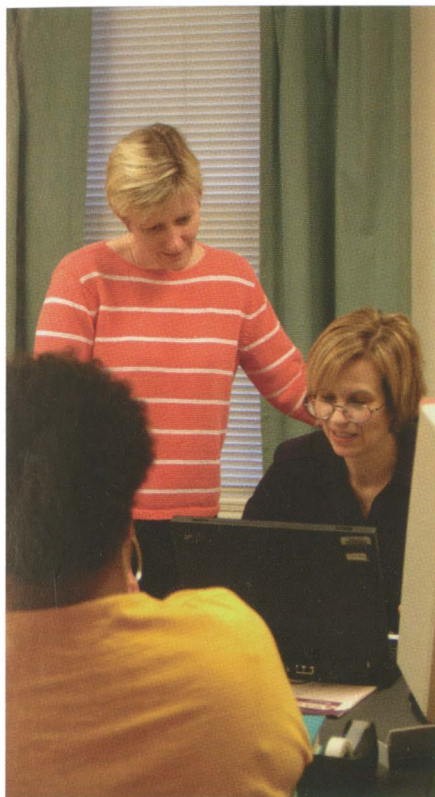
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## Making taxes less taxing

*Furman volunteers assist with IRS-sponsored program*



**Suzanne Summers (left) and Marianne Pierce, professors of economics and business administration, help a client prepare a return at Greenville's United Ministries headquarters.**

For many, April 15 — Tax Day — is a dreaded date.

This year, however, approximately 30 Furman students, faculty and staff helped local citizens assuage their fears and complete their tax forms through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program, a free, Internal Revenue Service-sponsored tax return preparation service. People receiving help through the program must earn less than \$35,000 per year.

Suzanne Summers, associate professor of economics and business administration who helped establish the Furman chapter of VITA, says the program “provides income tax assistance to people who can’t afford to pay for it because their money is needed to buy food or other essentials.”

Tax preparation firms, Summers says, may charge fees ranging from \$50 to \$200 for preparing a non-itemized tax return. That’s a lot of money for most VITA clients, many of whom are already uneasy about completing even the most basic tax return.

And although, as Summers says, “Most of the people we work with are very intimidated by the process,” they still “want to make sure their taxes are done correctly. We help them do that.”

Summers was a VITA volunteer as

an undergraduate accounting major at the University of South Carolina. She reconnected with the program after working with Furman’s Lilly Center for the Theological Exploration of Vocation in the summer of 2001.

The Furman volunteers prepared for their assignments by completing a 20-hour training session in January. Using a computer program and laptop provided by the IRS, they went on to provide assistance at two downtown locations, United Ministries and Triune United Methodist Church, and at the Northwest Crescent Center near the university.

Summers describes the interaction with community members as “unbelievably rewarding because they are so grateful, and many of them find it hard to understand that the service is free.” She expects the Furman program to grow in popularity each year as the public becomes more aware of its availability.

There are thousands of VITA chapters throughout the United States, including several in Greenville. Some tax preparation firms also operate a VITA chapter.

— Mary Brannon '04

*The author earned her degree in English this spring.*

## Vick receives Verner Award for contributions to the arts

Bingham Lafayette Vick, Jr., professor of music at Furman since 1970, was honored this spring with the Elizabeth O’Neill Verner Award, the highest honor the state of South Carolina gives in the arts.

Since 1972 the Verner awards, which are officially the “Governor’s Awards for the Arts,” have recognized organizations, patrons, artists, businesses and public officials for their achievements and contributions as leading supporters and advocates of the arts in the Palmetto State. With the other 2004 recipients, Vick was feted at a May 6 ceremony in the chambers of the South Carolina State House.

A graduate of Stetson University, Vick earned his master’s and Ph.D. from

Northwestern University. He serves as coordinator of choral ensembles at Furman and teaches voice, conducting, choral methods and choral literature. He just completed his 34th year as director of the Furman Singers, one of the nation’s most highly regarded collegiate choirs. He is also artistic director and conductor of the Greenville Chorale and of its professional Chorale Chamber Ensemble, and for 28 years he was music director at Greenville’s Westminster Presbyterian Church.

Vick has been past president of the Southern Division of the American Choral Directors Association, past president of the ACDA and past state president of the National Association of Teachers of Singing.



He has been invited to conduct all-state choirs in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Georgia.

Vick received the university’s Alester G.

Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Teaching in 1984. In 2000, the state of South Carolina awarded him the Order of the Palmetto, its highest civilian honor, in recognition of his outstanding leadership and contributions to the arts in the state.